



# Update on Suisun Marsh Plan

March 2006

## Charter Group



## Suisun Marsh could help imperiled Delta Smelt

The Suisun Marsh provides key habitat for the imperiled delta smelt, a tiny fish whose diminishing numbers cause ripples through a wide range of activities and needs in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The delta smelt has been protected under both the federal and state endangered species acts since 1993.

Now there is awareness that the Suisun Marsh might provide some significant help for smelt, because its decline in the Marsh has been less pronounced than in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. That pattern gives hope to biologists that the Marsh can provide important habitat for the smelt.

In its October 2005 "Delta Smelt Action Plan," the California Resources Agency cited the Suisun Marsh as an important element in the smelt's survival. The plan cites on-going efforts to enhance managed wetlands and restore tidal wetlands in the Marsh as important programs that can benefit many species, including the delta smelt. "Suisun Marsh provides foraging and rearing habitat for several species, including delta smelt and serves as a critical link between the Delta and San Francisco Bay," according to the report.

"Only about 10 per cent of the marsh's original tidal wetlands remain," the report cautions, so "the completion of the proposed restoration projects would significantly increase that acreage to provide additional foraging and rearing habitat."

As the largest brackish marsh in the U.S., Suisun Marsh could have a major role in improving conditions for the smelt. With 6,300 acres of tidal wetlands, there are important opportunities to provide habitat for delta smelt. Already projects covering 670 acres of tidal wetland restoration are under way. While the prospective benefits to the delta smelt are not fully known, it is hoped that carrying out restoration in an area historically important to the smelt will increase prospects for its recovery.

## Work due to begin soon on Programmatic EIR/EIS

The SMP Principals are in the final stages of selecting a contractor to prepare a Programmatic EIR/EIS on the Suisun Marsh Plan. The contractor is expected to start work in the next few months.

The Suisun Marsh Plan is being developed by a team of local, state and federal agencies, all focused on improving the health of the Marsh. Formally known as the *Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan for the Suisun Marsh*, the effort is often shortened to Suisun Marsh Plan for ease of reference. The plan is intended, within the Suisun Marsh, to protect and enhance the vital Pacific Flyway plus existing wildlife and endangered species, maintain and improve levees, restore its tidal marsh and other ecosystems, and improve its water quality

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The Suisun Marsh Plan is:

Local, state and federal agencies that, through the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, help improve the San Francisco Bay-Delta

Estuary are partnering on a plan to protect and enhance wildlife values and water quality in Suisun Marsh, the largest brackish wetland in the western United States.

Members of the partnership, known as the Suisun Marsh Charter Group, are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Department of Water Resources, and the California Bay-Delta Authority. The partnership also includes the Suisun Resource Conservation District, which represents the interests of private landowners. The Charter Group works with other participating agencies, including the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in developing this plan.

Information is on the SMP website at:

[www.delta.dfg.ca.gov/suisunmarsh/charter](http://www.delta.dfg.ca.gov/suisunmarsh/charter)

This periodic newsletter and other alerts can be obtained by signing up for the mailing list through [Carolyn\\_fassler@fws.gov](mailto:Carolyn_fassler@fws.gov).

## Project Leaders Tour Suisun Marsh

Key water and resource agency managers received a first-hand introduction to the Suisun Marsh last October, guided by Steve Chappell and other SMP Charter Principals.

The tour provided an opportunity for the managers to better understand the significance of the Suisun Marsh in its own area and to the state of California as a whole. Participants found that Suisun Marsh is the largest contiguous brackish marsh in the U.S., encompassing 90,000 acres of wetlands and sloughs.

Chappell, Executive Director for the Suisun Resource Conservation District, pointed out that local landowners pay nearly 100 per cent of the cost of repairing and maintaining the local private levees so critical to the environmental health of the Marsh. Tour participants also gained better understanding of how the Suisun Marsh makes important contributions to the local ecology and to the wider health of the fish and fowl in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and much of the state.

Participants included Lester Snow, Director of the California Department of Water Resources; Kirk Rodgers, Regional Director for the US Bureau of Reclamation; Ryan Broddrick, Director of the California Department of Fish and Game; Steve Thompson, California-Nevada Operations Manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Joe Grindstaff, Interim Executive Director of the California Bay-Delta Authority, among others.

## Looking for Maps of Suisun Marsh?

A dozen maps that show different aspects of Suisun Marsh, including soils and vegetation maps, are available on the website

[www.delta.dfg.ca.gov/suisunmarsh/charter](http://www.delta.dfg.ca.gov/suisunmarsh/charter). The maps are a useful resource for those interested in learning more about this complex and important area of California. Click on the Suisun Marsh Atlas link for the maps.



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